



How social care staff can support the health needs of people with learning disabilities

Why should health issues matter to social care staff?

People with learning disabilities have poorer health and die younger.



They are three times more likely than people in the general population to die from something that could have been prevented by good quality care.



People with learning disabilities have poorer access to health services.

They are more likely to go to hospital for conditions that should be manageable by their GP and other community health services.

They are more likely to take lots of medication – some of which they may not need.



People with learning disabilities have less healthy lifestyles:

- their diet is less healthy
- they do not do as much exercise

Good support can help people with learning disabilities live longer and have healthier and better lives.

There are lots of ways in which social care staff can help the people they support to get better healthcare.



Health is everyone's responsibility

Ten things social care staff can do



1. Encourage more healthy life choices¹:
 - support people to buy and cook healthy, fresh food
 - support people to do regular exercise



2. Make sure they are on their GP's learning disability register.



3. Find out more about any health conditions they have and how to support them to manage these.
Support the person to get the health checks and care they need for their eyes, ears, teeth² and feet.



4. Some people with learning disabilities can't tell people they are in pain.³ Be aware of how they show pain. Think about pain as a possible reason for behaviour that challenges or changes in behaviour.



5. Support people to go for an annual health check⁴ and take part in screening programmes.⁵



6. Make sure the person has a health action plan⁶ and that the actions in it get done.



7. Reasonable adjustments⁷ are changes health services should make so that the person can access their services. Think about what changes are needed to help someone to use health services. Make sure these are put in place for them.



8. Make sure the Mental Capacity Act⁸ is being used when medical decisions are being made.
Make sure the person has an independent mental capacity advocate if they need one.



9. Support the person when they go into hospital⁹:
 - make sure they have an up to date hospital passport¹⁰
 - help them prepare for their visit and think about any reasonable adjustments they might need



10. Suggest your organisation signs up to the health charter¹¹ if it has not already done so.

Key messages:

- people with learning disabilities do not have to have poor health
- poor health is not just about health services
- the things social care staff do (or don't do) make a difference to the health of the people they support
- poor health can lead to a shorter, and poorer quality, of life

This is the first in a series of health factsheets for social care staff. You can find others and more [guidance](#) for social care providers.

There is a [supporting set of slides](#) for this document that can be used by social care staff as a training resource.

The pictures in this factsheet are from Photosymbols: www.photosymbols.co.uk

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https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/655383/Social_care_staff_supporting_screening_in_learning_disabilities.pdf

⁶ <http://www.rcgp.org.uk/clinical-and-research/toolkits/-/media/CDF78960FA5C43B09F641EB06E46AB94.ashx>

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https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/655373/Social_care_staff_supporting_reasonable_adjustments_in_learning_disabilities.pdf

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https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/655384/Social_care_staff_supporting_hospital_admissions_in_learning_disabilities.pdf

¹⁰ www.easyhealth.org.uk/listing/hospital-passports-%28leaflets%29

¹¹ www.vodg.org.uk/publications/health-charter-for-social-care-providers